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Weather Signs- Fact or Fable?

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Weather Signs - Fact or Fable?

by Gerald L. Barger

WET MOON—dry moon—ring around the sun. What should we believe? Some of these old weather signs are based on facts. Others are completely unfounded. Let's sort out a few of the facts and eliminate some of the fables.

Ring Around Sun

A ring around the sun (or moon) often *does* precede rainy weather. This ring—or halo as it's often called—is caused by the light of the sun being refracted as it passes through a thin layer of high clouds. These clouds, called cirrus, are higher than the freezing level and are made up of ice crystals rather than droplets of water. A halo is ordinarily at least 6,000 or 7,000 feet high.

Cirrus clouds, in a thickening and lowering layer, indicate a flow of moisture into a region. Although, like all signs, it's far from foolproof, this inflow of moisture aloft precedes rain. Of course it's the inflow of moisture, not the halo, which brings rain, but the halo is an effective means of identifying cirrus clouds which often precede rain. Thus the ring around the sun is a weather sign based upon fact.

Phase of Moon

The phase of the moon, however, bears no known relationship to weather—wet or dry, hot or cold. In the first place, interpretations often contradict each other. One says the moon is wet because the farmer can hang his harness on it—rain will keep him out of the fields. Another says the same moon is dry because it's tipped so that no water can run out of it.

Nor does any experimental evidence exist to support the contention that you should plant your crops during a certain phase of the moon. Good seed, proper seedbed preparation and fertilization, weed and pest control, and a little luck with the weather will assure your bumper crop—not a phase of the moon.

And luck with the weather can't be attributed to the moon either. The proof of any cause and effect is in prediction. If there were any real cause and effect relationship between phases of the moon and the weather, forecasters would be only too happy to make use of it. They're not a proud group; their job is so difficult they'd gladly grasp a new tool if it held the answer to their problems.

Animal, Plant Prophets

Animals often are cited as weather prophets, as are certain plant characteristics. If falling barometric pressure, for example, causes a given reaction in an animal, then that reaction is a reliable indication of stormy weather. But changes in the barometer don't influence the weather more than a few days in advance. Animals can't tell you what the weather will be like several weeks or months from now.

Most animal signs are attributed to farsighted preparations for a hard winter—or a mild one. But animals don't look that far ahead, not even as well as we do. Animals respond to conditions they've already experienced, not to coming conditions. A heavy coat of fur may be the result of cold weather

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already past but certainly not the result of cold weather yet to come.

Plant characteristics are determined even more definitely by the conditions in which they've been living. They have absolutely *no* thought for the future. They do *not* tighten their seed coverings to prepare for an unusually cold winter.

Wind Directions

There are some other very reliable weather signs, however. An east wind in Iowa quite often brings rainy weather. An east wind usually means that a low-pressure area is passing south of us.

Winds blow counter-clockwise around a low-pressure center. Had the "low" passed north of us, we'd have experienced the westerly winds associated with its southern portion instead of the easterly winds along the northern sector. To complete this circle, air travels from the south in the eastern portion and from the north along the western edge of the low-pressure center.

If the low passes to the south of us, it means that warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico is being carried up over colder, heavier air at the ground level. The warm air is cooled, and its moisture is condensed out as rain.

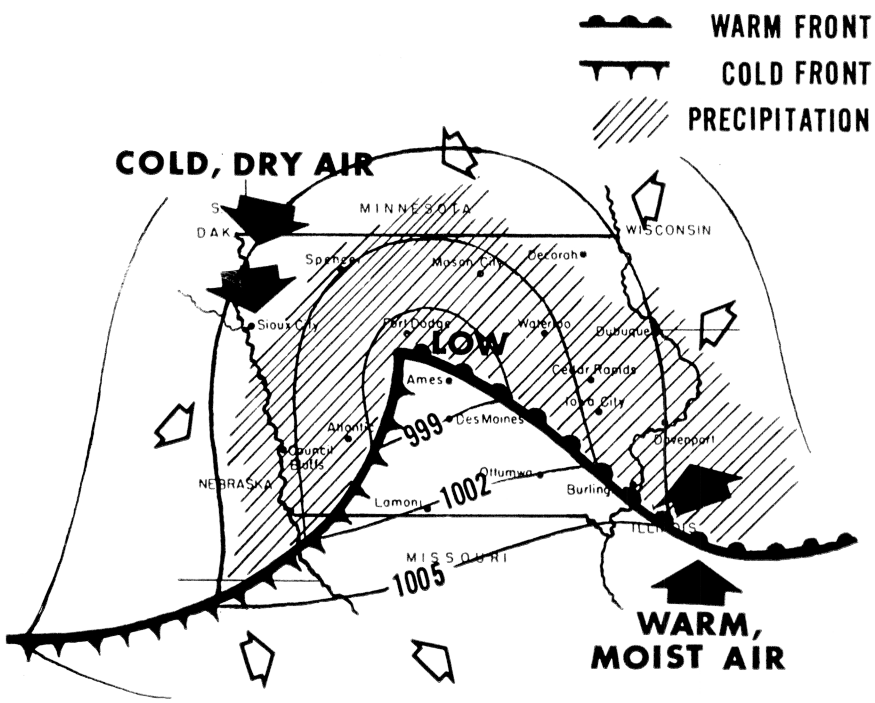
If the low passes to the north of us, and we therefore get westerly winds, the precipitation area is north of us, and we don't get much rain. An east wind won't always bring rain, mind you, but as weather signs go it's a good one. It has a basis in fact.

Bunions, Joints

The time-honored bunion or rheumatic joint may not be such a bad weather prophet either. It's not difficult to presume that increasing humidity, changing barometric pressure or temperature, or a difference in cloudiness might cause a very noticeable reaction in an afflicted member of one's body. Thus such signs may have a basis in fact.

Rains on Monday

"If it rains on Monday, it'll rain three days of the week." This may have some truth in it because rains do tend to occur on consecutive days. But if it rains on Wednesday, it's still just as likely to rain 2 more days during the next 6. Most rains apparently don't care or know which day of the week it is anyway.



This drawing shows how winds blow counter-clockwise around a low-pressure area. Winds on the eastern edge are warm and moist, while winds on the western edge are cold and dry.

Sun Spots

Sun spots have been studied for years by scientists. Their appearance can be predicted with fair reliability by astronomers. And sun spots do affect the amount of radiation reaching us from the sun. Any change in the amount of light and heat received from the sun could well be influential in determining the circulation pattern of our atmosphere.

But as in the case of the wet and dry moon, there's no definite agreement as to whether a maximum of sun spots causes wet or dry weather. The effects upon our atmosphere just aren't big enough to be measured readily.

Sun, Moon Positions

The positions of the sun and moon with relation to the earth determine the rise and fall of ocean tides. Tides can be predicted quite accurately. Likewise, the sun and the moon have an attraction for the atmosphere which surrounds the globe. Attempts have been made to forecast weather far in advance from knowledge of these atmospheric tides, but to date no accepted method has been put forth. These atmospheric tides are quite minute anyway.

Times of Year

All sorts of relationships between different times of the year are heard. A hot June means a hot summer; an abnormally cold winter will be followed by a very hot summer . . .

There's a noticeable persistence to certain kinds of weather, and tomorrow tends to be like today a great deal of the time. But to make long-range predictions from such relationships is being rather optomistic.

Test Reliability

If you have a pet method of predicting weather, you're probably

quite honest in thinking it reliable. But have you counted failures as faithfully as successes? Most of us tend to remember *after* an extremely cold winter that the husks on the corn were tight-fitting the previous fall.

The important thing is to make your forecasts for specific periods of time in the future. Then religiously count all successes and failures. Don't rely on memory alone—write them down. Repeat your experiment time after time.

Don't be downhearted if you fail about as often as you succeed. Hundreds of trained scientists are working full time at both private and government expense seeking "weather signs" that are reliable. They're making progress bit by bit and are discovering some facts.

No one yet has devised a scheme for predicting weather for a small area more than a few days in advance. And even those few days, or 1 day for that matter, cause forecasters plenty of trouble.

Sort Them Out

Don't put your faith in too many of the old weather proverbs you hear. Sort out those which are based on atmospheric conditions—cloud characteristics, wind shifts and things definitely a part of the weather.

Many of these may be helpful. Every trained forecaster knows that a long-time resident of a farming community can make a quite accurate forecast of tomorrow's weather. He uses no charts or maps and appears to make the forecast "out of his head."

Actually he doesn't do it that simply. He is, perhaps subconsciously, bringing together his observations of the past few days in the light of years of experience in his locality when he makes a forecast. He's watched the wind shifts, cloud formations and changes in temperature and humidity.

But let's beware of signs which have no real basis in atmospheric conditions. Some of them are plausible. Many of them are interesting. Most of them are fables.

Timing and Quality Mean More Egg Dollars

by Ralph L. Baker and George Judge

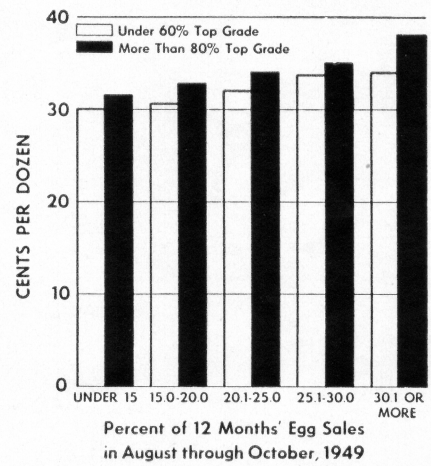
YOU MAY be able to boost your annual egg receipts by about 10 cents a dozen at present price levels by making a few changes in the practices on your farm. In many instances you can make these changes with little or no cash outlay.

A recent study (covering the 12-month period ending June 1950) of prices and practices of egg producers in three Iowa communities showed that differences in the average price received between high-price and low-price producers were almost entirely due to two factors:

- The proportion of yearly sales in the high-priced months—August, September and October.
- The percentage of top-grade eggs sold.

An additional 10 cents per dozen would mean a substantial increase in yearly gross income for most egg producers. At one plant a producer keeping about 350 hens received the lowest average price for the 12-month period. If he had received the same average price as the highest-price producer at that plant, he would have boosted his cash income by $380. Facilities for handling the

Fig. 1. Both Time of Sale and Quality Affect Price



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